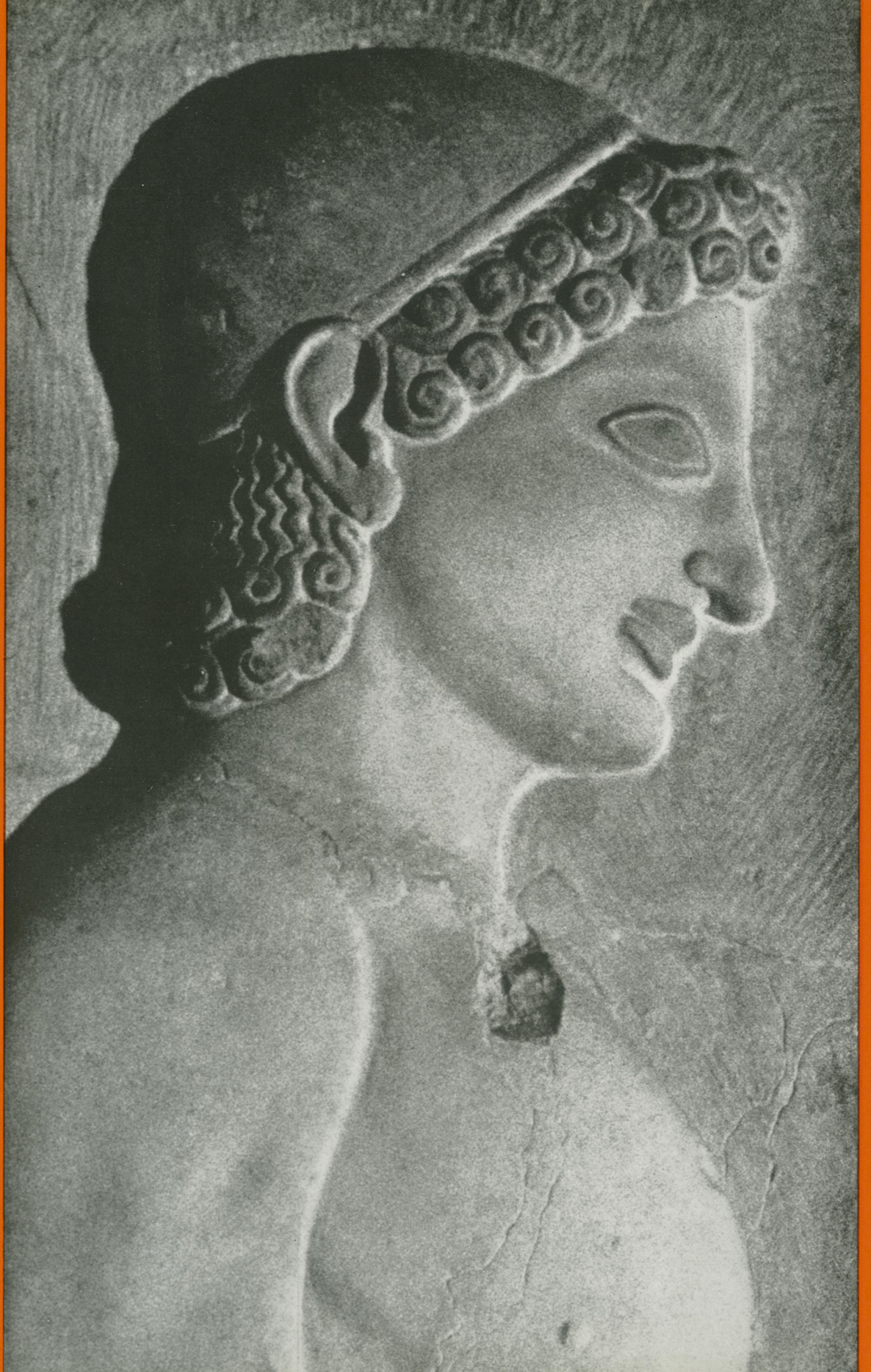
The Metropolitan Museum of Art BULLETIN *January 1970*



This month two of the Metropolitan's most dynamic Trustees will assume positions of great importance to the future of the Museum. Arthur A. Houghton, Jr., becomes Chairman of the Board of Trustees, and C. Douglas Dillon becomes its President.

Both are distinguished in their own right, both have served the Museum with distinction for many years. Arthur Houghton is president of Steuben Glass, trustee of United States Trust Company, and director of Corning Glass Works, New York Life Insurance Company, and the United States Steel Corporation. His interest in the arts and education is shown by his positions as a member of the trust fund board of the Library of Congress, vice-president of the Pierpont Morgan Library and the Corning Museum of Glass, and trustee of the New York Public Library, the Rockefeller Foundation, and the Cooper Union. A Trustee of the Metropolitan since 1952, Arthur Houghton was elected President of the Board in 1964. Under his imaginative leadership, more special exhibitions were presented than ever before and, seeking new ways to serve the public, our educational program has been expanded. Much of the credit for the Museum's achievements over the past five years goes to Arthur Houghton.

A distinguished member of the financial community and a devoted public servant, C. Douglas Dillon has been active in the affairs of the Museum ever since his election as a Trustee in 1951, serving on the Executive and Finance Committees and as Trustee-Visitor to the Department of Prints. He became an Honorary Trustee on entering government service in 1953. Having been Ambassador to France, Under Secretary of State, and Secretary of the Treasury under Presidents Kennedy and Johnson, he resumed his status as an elective Trustee in 1965 and was elected a Vice-President in 1968. He is at present Chairman of the United States and Foreign Securities Corporation. He is also President of the Board of Overseers of Harvard University, Chairman of the Brookings Institution, and trustee for the Rockefeller Foundation and the Council on Foreign Relations. He is a member of the General Advisory Committee on Arms Control and Disarmament, and is chairman of the International Council of the Museum of Modern Art.

On his election as President of the Board last November, Mr. Dillon said: "I am honored to have been elected President of the Metropolitan Museum. My association with the Museum over the last two decades has been an exciting experience for me, and I look forward to serving both the Museum and the public in this new capacity.

"The next years will be important ones for the Museum as our building program gets under way and as we seek to enlarge our financial support and broaden its sources. With ever-increasing emphasis on our educational activities, we will attempt to make the Museum increasingly meaningful to a constantly growing public.

"I have had an exceedingly warm relationship with the staff of the Museum during the past years, and I look forward to the still deeper association we are now entering upon. We are all fortunate to have Arthur Houghton as our Chairman; his knowledge and experience will be of inestimable value as the Museum begins its second hundred years."

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The positions to which these men have been elected are not sinecures. The Chairman and the President bear the responsibility for making many of the Museum's most far-reaching policy decisions, and their advice is continually sought by the Trustees and administration. The prospect of working with two people of such excellence and far-sighted concern is a stimulating one for me, and the Metropolitan Museum is fortunate in having as its leaders men of such extraordinary ability as Arthur Houghton and Douglas Dillon.

THOMAS P. F. HOVING, *Director*

The newly elected Chairman and President of the Board of Trustees: Arthur A. Houghton, Jr. (left), and C. Douglas Dillon

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The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin

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Late this spring the Metropolitan Museum, in cooperation with New York City's Parks, Recreation, and Cultural Affairs Administration, will launch its first mobile exhibition, a visual education project called Eye Opener. The exhibition is based on spiral shapes in nature, in everyday objects, and in art, and its purpose is simply to introduce the pleasures of seeing to people of all ages. Housed on a flatbed trailer that opens out under an inflatable dome, Eye Opener will tour New York City neighborhoods for two years. It is being financed largely through a generous grant from the Billy Rose Foundation.

Jane Norman, who created this first exhibition, has been an art educator for many years, both in suburban schools and in special projects in New York City. In addition to her work on Eye Opener, Mrs. Norman has given a popular lecture series at the Metropolitan entitled "The Art of Seeing."

How to Look at Art

JANE NORMAN

Crowded museums provide dramatic proof that an increasing number of people want to look at works of art. But watching visitors as they wander through the galleries is a disheartening experience. In general, they glance only cursorily at a work and then make a careful study of the label beside it. Packed lecture halls and the sale of thousands of art books are evidence that people want to understand the artist's message but have no confidence in their ability to do so.

Having learned to think in words, most of us must be re-educated to think in shapes and colors and spaces, for that is the only way to understand a work of art. There is truth in the old cliché that if an artist wanted to use words to make his statement he would be a writer, not a painter, craftsman, or sculptor. I believe we can teach people how to analyze visual data – how to really look at works of art. There is no substitute for a good ear in listening to music; a good eye is equally necessary for looking at art. Indeed, what is required is a creative eye, for creative looking is necessary to full comprehension of the ideas and feelings expressed through an art object. Communication with an artist must be through his work. It must be direct, not diluted by verbal translation.

As a teacher I have two basic aims: first, to give people the courage to depend upon their own eyes, brains, and emotional responses to "read" a work of art; second, to provide them with a technique that makes it possible to concentrate on an object for a long time – long enough to be able to memorize its essential elements and the relationships between them. When you take away with you a clear image of the object, then you can analyze and compare its forms with those observed in other works of art and, in fact, with all other things, whether natural or man-made, commonplace or rare.

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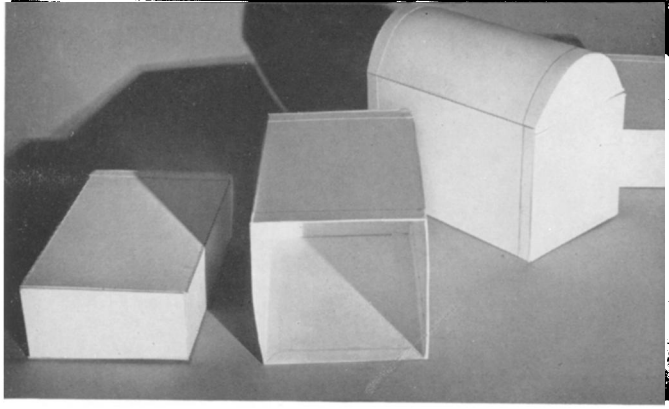
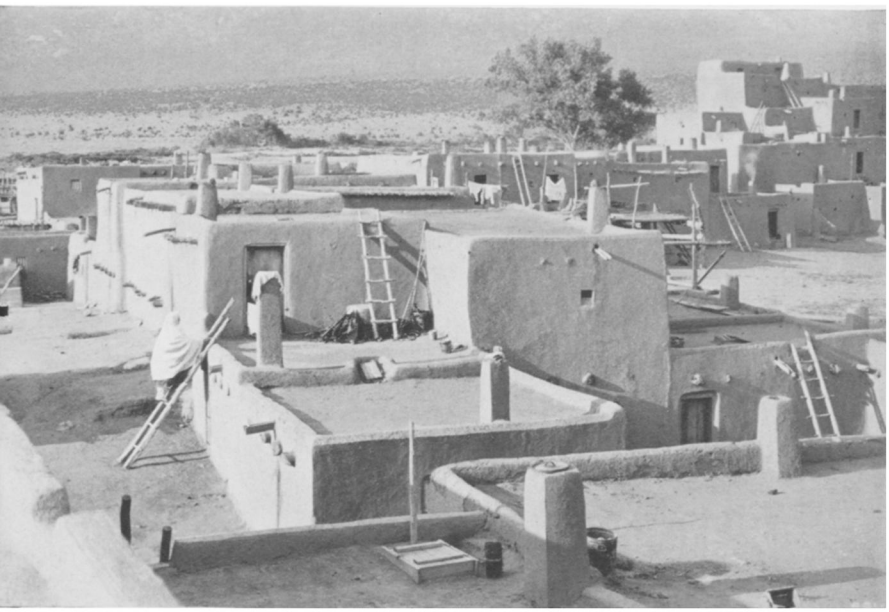
My technique is to select a single visual element, one that is common in both art and nature, and ask students to search for it in its multitudinous sizes, shapes, and positions. I have asked them to explore such basic forms as the square and circle and to see how they are used in paintings, buildings, or household objects. The isolation of one element is an artificial technique and the selection quite arbitrary, but this method has been tested and it works. It makes looking a game of search, so students find it fun. It helps them look at things in a new way, so it is stimulating. Teachers can adapt the technique for their own purposes.

The traveling exhibition called *Eye Opener* is the Metropolitan Museum's new way of taking its visual education program out into the neighborhoods of New York City. Spiral forms in the art of all ages and cultures will be exhibited "live" and in photographs and slides; we'll also show spirals in nature – in shells, cones, nebulae; and spirals designed for man's use – in springs, bolts, ropes. Visitors will be able to make "op" spirals and to design wrought-iron gates and fences using curled paper patterns. Our hope is that visitors to the show will become "spiral minded," never again able to pass a spiral without taking note of it – and, more important, that they will become more conscious of the other universal forms that have always been the basic vocabulary of artists and craftsmen.

The following pictures pursuing boxlike shapes through many kinds of art illustrate this technique of introducing people to the art of seeing. Photographs are never a satisfactory representation of three-dimensional objects, and I hope you will go to see the things shown here. Most of them are in the Metropolitan Museum, others are elsewhere in New York. In the meantime, the pictures – the boxes – are the most important part of the story. I urge you to look at them *before* you read the captions. The objects illustrated here can serve as the basis for teaching programs for people of all ages and backgrounds. Children will look for shape and size relationships, comparing boxes they see every day with the caskets and sarcophagi they see in museums, and interior spaces in their own environment with the museum's exhibition rooms. At the same time, the most highly sophisticated observer can find in changing box shapes the visual expression of changing attitudes toward beauty, mathematics, and space – even of changing attitudes toward God and man.

These cardboard boxes could be models for matchboxes, sarcophagi, wagons, or barns. When they are stripped of decoration and all clues indicating their size and function, it becomes possible to examine them as abstract forms. We note the proportions of each side and the proportions of length to width to height. We become aware of the shape of the space that the six sides enclose. In other words, we become shape and space conscious.





Men have designed circular, pyramidal, cylindrical, even freeform buildings, but on the whole, buildings are boxes or clusters of boxes. The quality of their design is determined, to a large extent, by the proportions of the sides to each other. Although there have been times when the architect was expected to camouflage the boxy shape of his building, usually the underlying structure remains visible. There are no more boxlike houses than the pueblos of the southwest Indians and Philip Johnson's Wiley house in Connecticut. The irregularity of the handmade walls and the contrast of clay with the timbers supporting the roof give the pueblos great eye appeal. The pure lines of the machine-made glass house that makes possible total indoor-outdoor living give the Wiley house a magic elegance. Yet the opaque and the transparent house have one thing in common – to a large extent their beauty derives from the beauty of the proportions of their boxlike forms.

Pueblos at Taos, New Mexico, and the Robert Wiley house at New Haven, Connecticut, designed by Philip Johnson, 1953

Photograph: Ezra Stoller

Cubiculum from a villa at Boscoreale. Roman, third quarter of the 1 century B.C. Length of floor 19 feet 1⅞ inches, width 10 feet 11½ inches. Rogers Fund, 03.14.13

Though these rooms appear to have little in common, the proportion of the length to breadth is actually very similar. Comparison of the two interiors illustrates some ways in which designers and builders can manipulate a structure's appearance. The bedroom from a villa near Pompeii has been painted to represent a richly carved loggia facing courtyards and gardens, with a Roman metropolis in the distance. Though the painted walls do not fool us, and never could have, they do succeed in transforming the appearance of the room from an enclosed narrow place to a spacious airy one.

Whereas the walls of the Roman room seem to dissolve, the walls of the medieval one – a modern construction in the style of French Gothic chapels – enclose and protect. The stones from which they were built are essential elements of the design. The individual blocks are evident – we can see how they were placed for maximum strength (note the ones around the niche at the left). Their smooth surface provides an exciting contrast to the intricate carvings of architectural detail and sculptures, and their pale coldness provides dramatic contrast to the warm jeweled tones of the stained-glass windows. If the bedroom looks wider and longer than it actually is, the chapel looks higher. This effect is achieved by the use of narrow windows, pointed arches, steep ribbed vaults, and clusters of narrow piers that lead the eye from floor to ceiling.

The Gothic Chapel at The Cloisters

Photograph: Hans Namuth

The marvelous little reliquary at The Cloisters, ten inches high, resembles a Gothic chapel, while the Ste. Chapelle in Paris looks like a huge reliquary – which is what it was intended as: St. Louis ordered its construction to receive the rare treasures that he had brought home from the Crusades, pieces of the True Cross and the Crown of Thorns. Margaret B. Freeman, Curator Emeritus of The Cloisters, believes that in its original state the reliquary had a steeper roof and central spire. If so, it must have looked even more like the Ste. Chapelle. The boxes are the same shape, architectural details are similar, and the walls of both are divided into panels depicting biblical scenes and figures. Both have walls aglow with color: translucent enamel and silver-gilt adorn the reliquary, and the drabness of the chapel's exterior is amply compensated for by its interior: its walls are stained-glass windows supported by narrow piers of stone.

OPPOSITE

Reliquary shrine. French (Paris), about 1340-1350. Silver-gilt and enamel, height 10 inches. The Cloisters Collection, 62.96

The Ste. Chapelle, Paris. French, 1246-1248

Photograph: French Embassy Press & Information Division

RIGHT

Document box (bunko). Japanese, XVIII century. Lacquer on wood, encrusted with pewter and shell, height 6 inches. Rogers Fund, 36.100.46

BELOW

Cassone. Italian, second half of the XVI century. Walnut, length 65½ inches. Gift of Ann Payne Blumenthal, 45.67.2

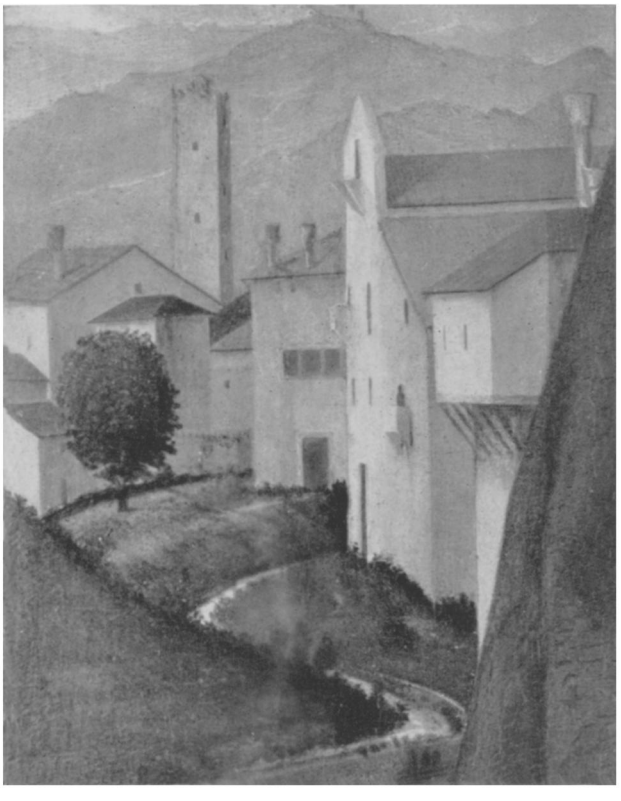
Boxes can be representative of the art of their cultures. A historian, anthropologist, or psychologist could, for instance, draw interesting conclusions about the difference between East and West by comparing the form, subject matter, and style of decoration of the ones shown here.

What did each craftsman think about design? The Italian was very much concerned with the boxiness of the chest. He carved each side as a separate, balanced composition, and set the relief in an ornate frame with particular accent on the corners. The Japanese craftsman was a painter. It looks as though he drew a delicate design of flowers, leaves, and butterflies on a sheet of paper, then wrapped it around the box, and painted the design in lacquer. But did he? Though he ignored the solidity of the three-dimensional box that was his canvas, he did plan a composition that works in two ways, both as a single unit with figures flowing across edges and corners, and as five beautifully balanced, asymmetrical compositions within a rectangle.

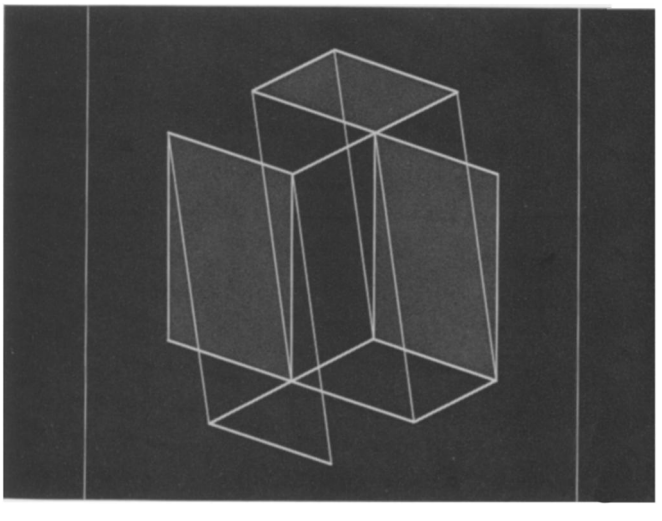
Renaissance artists were determined to make convincing pictures of the "real" world of volume and depth. They mastered the technique of modeling in light and shade, and worked out mathematical laws underlying perspective drawing. Although Bellini was painting a Madonna and Child, he could not resist showing off his ability to paint a group of houses to look as solid as stone blocks.

Many contemporary artists do not concern themselves with depicting the real world. They explore the strange and complex relationships between things and the way we see them, between the objective world and our subjective visual experience of it. Josef Albers uses Renaissance perspective in a revolutionary way: to dramatize the mystery and complexity of visual perception. A few straight lines and shaded planes look like an intricate arrangement of transparent boxes. Suddenly, just as we feel that we understand the relationship between the parts, the cubes turn themselves inside out, the volumes becoming spaces and vice versa.

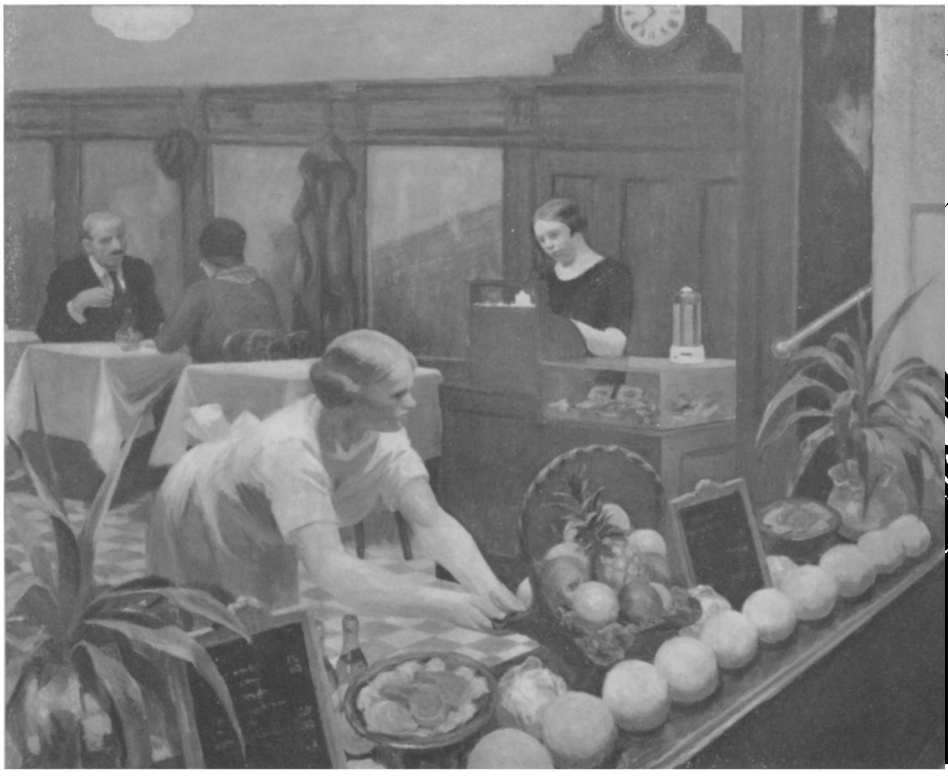
Madonna and Child, and detail, by Giovanni Bellini (about 1430-1516), Italian (Venice). Oil on wood, 35 x 28 inches. Rogers Fund, 08.183.1



Transformation of a Scheme Series: No. 26, by Josef Albers (born 1888), American. 1952. Machine-engraved in laminated formica, 17 x 22½ inches. Collection of the artist, exhibited in New York Painting and Sculpture: 1940-1970



Vermeer and Hopper organized space as architects do. With remarkable grace and subtlety each developed a system for manipulating line and color in order to transform the rectangle of the canvas into a convincing three-dimensional composition. In both paintings we see a corner of a room; the placement of objects and the gestures of figures are designed to call our attention to the boxlike space that is being represented, and all objects have been drawn and modeled to emphasize their underlying geometric forms. Note how often rectangles and boxes are introduced in the scenes. Note also that the proportions of many elements in the pictures seem to echo the shape of the canvas itself.



Young Woman with a Water Jug, by Johannes Vermeer (1632-1675), Dutch. Oil on canvas, 18 x 16 inches. Gift of Henry G. Marquand, 89.15.21

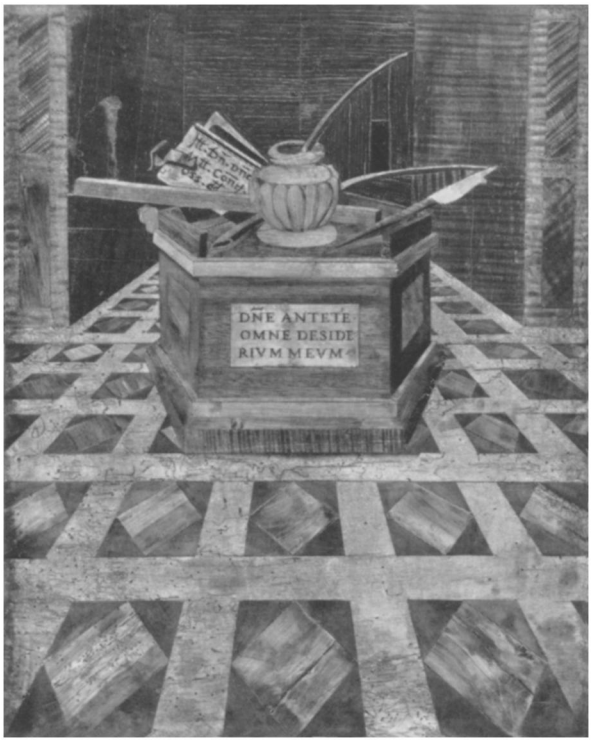
Tables for Ladies, by Edward Hopper (1882-1967), American. 1930. Oil on canvas, 48¼ x 60¼ inches. George A. Hearn Fund, 31.62

A room in the European paintings galleries in 1954

These photographs, taken from the same spot in the same gallery, look very different. The room apparently has changed in size and shape: the camera seems to respond to the differing decor of the room and art on exhibit just as we do. The "old master" paintings are meant to be looked at from a spot directly opposite the center of the canvas, and an ornate frame isolates each picture from the surrounding wall. Kenneth Noland, however, intended his paintings to "work" from any part of the room. His color stripes travel along a canvas that functions as a transportable section of wall (it can easily be rolled up and moved to another location). The paintings dramatize the expanse of the wall on which they hang, making the viewer very conscious of the real space of the gallery. They are designed to be looked at from near and far, straight on or at an angle. Spectators walking past the paintings add to their vitality rather than detract from it. The photographer was right to have people in the picture –paintings, white walls, gray carpet, and gallerygoers are all important elements of a total spatial composition.

The same room, showing paintings by Kenneth Noland, in the current exhibition New York Painting and Sculpture: 1940-1970

Photograph: Michael Fredericks, Jr.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Photographs: Ezra Stoller

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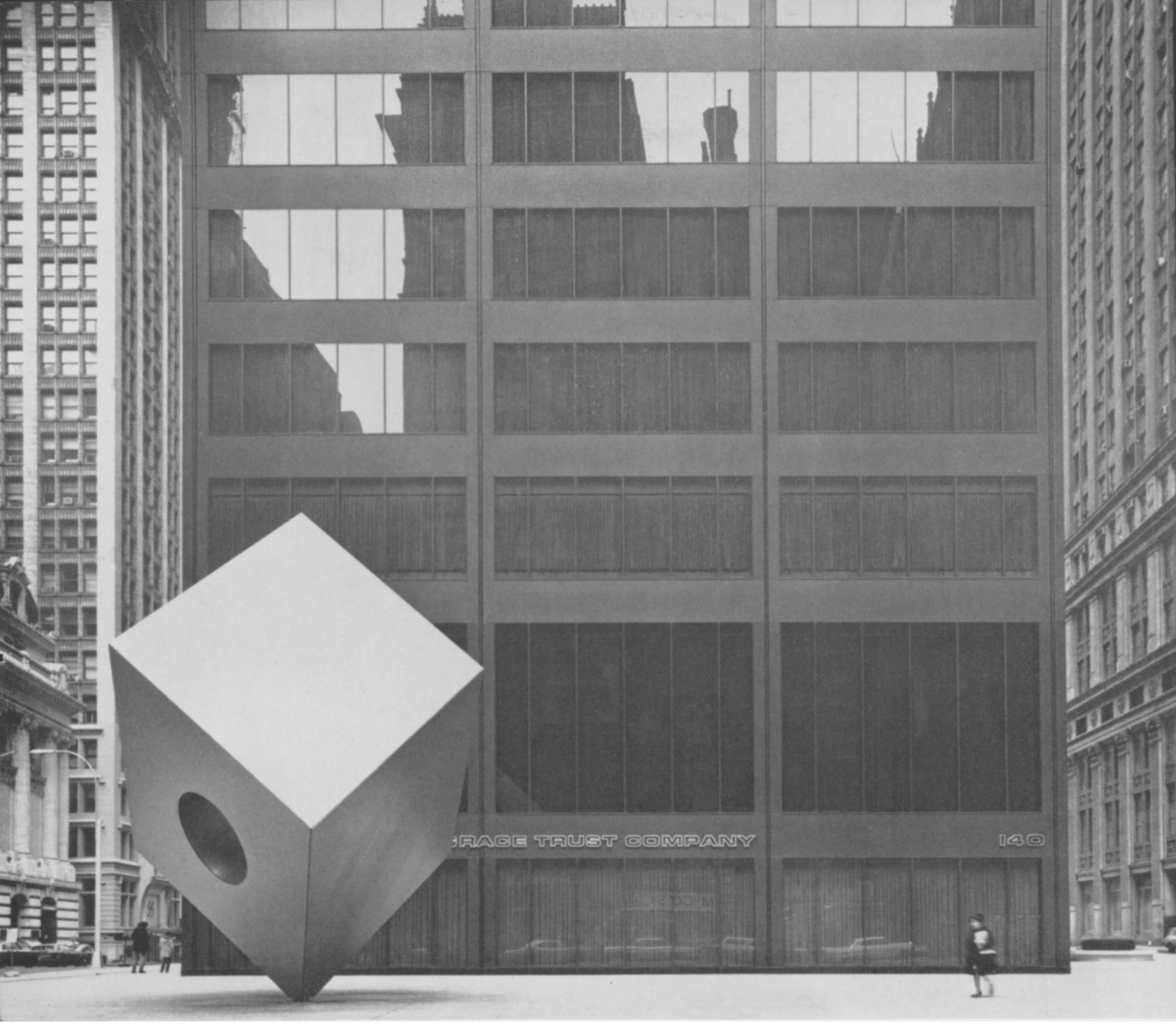


Sculpture by Isamu Noguchi in front of the Marine Midland Grace Trust Company Building at 140 Broadway, New York

There must be a hundred reasons why no sculpture similar to Noguchi's cube could have been commissioned, made, and erected before 1960. They include the technological skills required in the production and the willingness of large corporations to invest in works of art. But the primary reason is the change of public taste. Seldom before has originality been the prime criterion of artistic merit. For the first time a cube is accepted as proper subject matter for sculpture. The fact that it is balanced on one corner is a source of delight, the apparent defiance of the law of gravity producing a pleasing tension. We do not object to the fact that no human hand made this object – we have accepted the idea that machines can produce art. And we are particularly fascinated by the way in which Noguchi's box relates to the forms surrounding it: the functional office boxes enhancing the effect of the irreverent sculptured one.

Director's Choice

THOMAS P. F. HOVING

This article is adapted from a recorded tour available for rent at the Metropolitan Museum

Don't be misled by the title "Director's Choice": it doesn't imply that I will attempt the impossible task of selecting a handful of favorites from the three million works of art in the Metropolitan Museum. What I want to do is to point out sixteen islands in that limitless sea of visual cultural history, sixteen land bridges between one area of knowledge and another, without feeding you information collected on catalogue cards and labels or footnoted in art history books. My objective is to persuade you to *look* in a way that perhaps you might not ordinarily undertake.

Now, the first work I would like you to look at deeply is an imposing piece in our Greek and Roman collection: a large standing figure of a nude youth, or kouros. We know little about this sculpture, simply that it was supposedly found in Attica and that it came to the Museum in 1932. A superb example of archaic Greek art, it dates from the late seventh century B.C. and is the earliest known kouros that has ever come to the United States, and the earliest marble sculpture in our collection – indeed, one of the earliest in Greek art as such, pre-dating the building of the Parthenon.

But let's not dwell on dates: I'd like you to turn your mind to the artistic achievements incorporated in this image of young manhood. Notice the clearly defined musculature, the kneecaps done almost as if they were the heads of bulls, with two horns coming off at each side, the feet with the suggestion of insteps. These are indications of a growing awareness of human anatomy, breaking from the severe Egyptian depictions of pharaohs or high officials locked into the stone from which they were carved, and entering an era of relative freedom, of the beginning of movement and organic proportions.

This is not a particularly pleasing image, but it's real: a young man presenting himself to the gods. Throughout Greek art (and, indeed, even in reflecting waves) you get this emphasis upon the naked human figure – the clear delineation of beauty with nothing to hide.

From the epitaph inscribed on the base of this grave stele, we know that it was erected by grieving parents for their son, the young man represented in relief on the shaft. The inscription reads: "To dear Me[gakles] on his death, his father and his dear mother set [me] up as a monument." These are very poignant words: a sentiment any parents might express.

The monument is from Attica, the Greek artistic center, and is both the largest and the earliest piece of this sort to come out of Greece. But, as Gisela Richter (Curator of Greek and Roman Art here a number of years ago) said, the boy's face is "as fresh as when it left the sculptor's hands." The beautiful boy stands with a young girl, probably his sister. In his left hand he is holding a pomegranate, associated with Hades and Persephone, rulers of the underworld, and on his wrist hangs a flask containing oil, used by athletes to anoint themselves before competition.

To me this is a wonderful thing: it's serene and yet vigorous. Look at the chest and arms of this athlete, look at the confidence he has. And notice the difference between him and the kouros: just the lines of the chest, the muscles, the thigh. The relationship between the nipple and the chest here shows that in a period of less than one hundred years, anatomy has really burst through the old tradition and is lending an almost unbelievable animation to works of stone.

Grave stele of a youth and a girl. Greek (Attica), about 540-530 B.C. Marble, height 13 feet 10 11/16 inches. Hewitt, Rogers, and Munsey Funds and anonymous gift, 11.185

Photograph: Michael Fredericks, Jr.

Kouros. Greek, late VII century B.C. Marble, height with plinth 6 feet 4 inches. Fletcher Fund, 32.11.1

These are three of many paintings unearthed at Boscoreale, a small suburb of Pompeii, and they are the greatest such paintings to be seen outside of the museum in Naples, which has a large percentage of the treasures found at Pompeii and Herculaneum.

Archaeologists and art historians, who are sometimes overly involved with a tendency to categorize things, have given Roman wall paintings a series of stylistic designations: the First, Second, Third, and Fourth Styles. These are excellent examples of the Second Style, but I wouldn't worry too much about the classifications, because deep in graduate school neither I nor my professor (who finally admitted it) knew exactly what each one of them meant. The important thing is that here we have the flower of Roman art, direct from the great Hellenistic influence – superb figural painting, little of which has survived to our day.

Nobody really knows who these people are, but we have, on the left, a woman seated upon a graceful chair, playing a kithara, with a little girl standing behind – an extraordinarily vivid impression of two human beings, perhaps mother and daughter. In the center there is a man sitting on a throne, and next to him a woman in a rather pensive mood. And, at the right, a woman holds a shield, perhaps bearing armor for someone who had to go to fight the Trojan War.

The background is done in the true fresco technique: that is, paint applied to fresh plaster, sinking in and becoming almost impervious to the elements. When the background had dried, the figures were then added over it in tempera. The sense of observation and the deftness of handling in these frescoes are as good as in any done at the height of the Italian Renaissance.

The villa from which these paintings came was probably a gentleman farmer's retreat from the city – but it wasn't far enough from Pompeii to escape the great eruption of Mount Vesuvius in 79 A.D. that buried the area. The villa was unearthed in 1900, and three years later its wall paintings were sold at auction in Paris, when the Metropolitan acquired most of them. In addition to these frescoes, we also have an entire room, the cubiculum or small bedchamber illustrated in the preceding article.

Three paintings from a villa at Boscoreale. Roman, third quarter of the 1 century B.C. Fresco, average height 74 inches. Rogers Fund, 03.14.5, 6, 7

Photograph: Michael Fredericks, Jr.

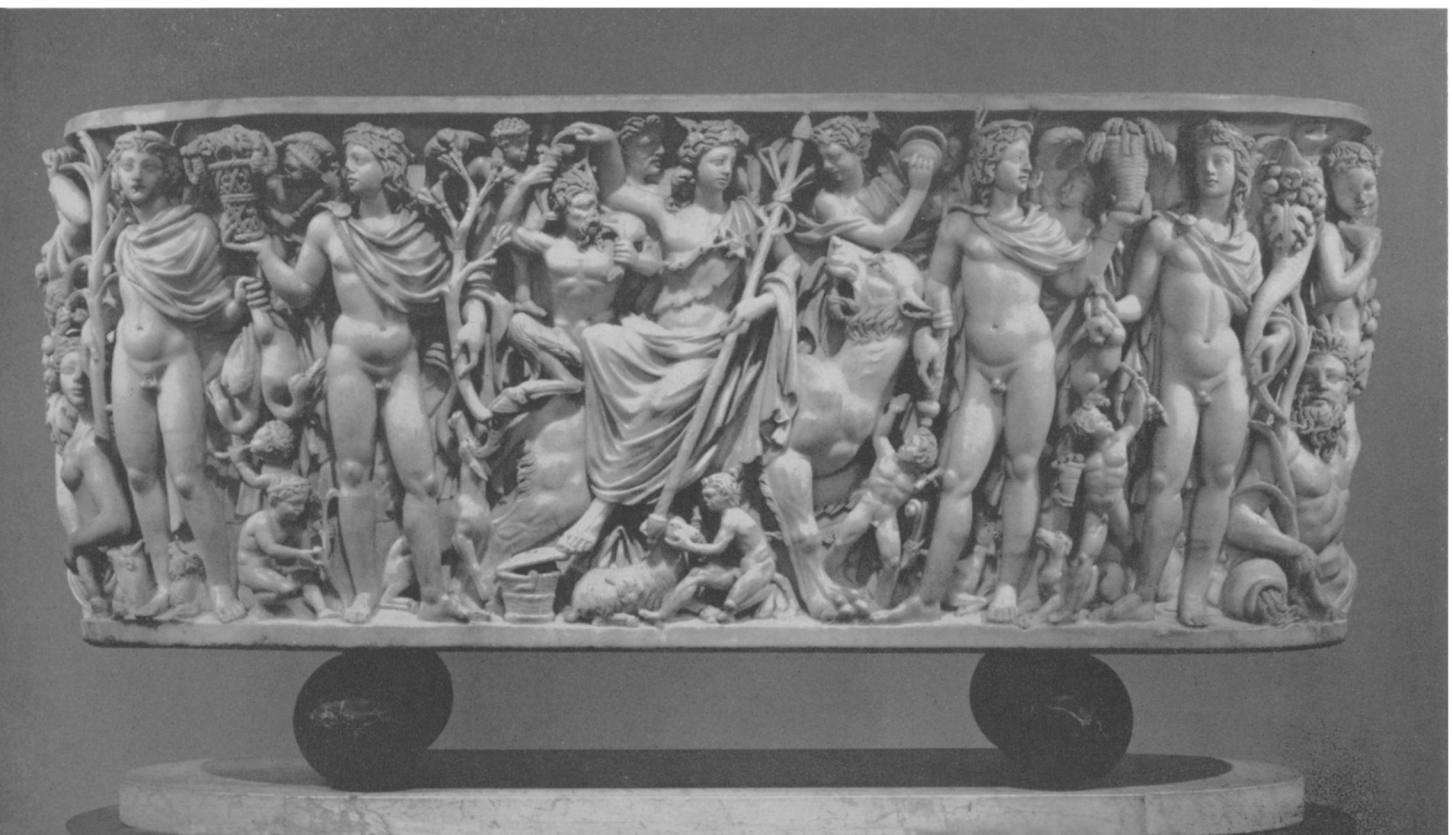
This sarcophagus dates to around 220-230 and is in the Severan style, named for the Emperor Septimius Severus (reigned 193-211). It is one of the loveliest examples of that very delicate, intricately undercut style favored for sarcophagi by the most influential and richest families of the time.

What it shows is Dionysus (or Bacchus, to use his Roman name), the god of wine, on the back of a panther, surrounded by all the creatures of his court: attendants, satyrs, and half-satyrs, with goats and dogs and other animals bounding about in the landscape. Among the forty figures, human and animal, are also representations of the Four Seasons.

The pedestal and the dark spheres that look so much like bowling balls are eighteenth-century mounts designed for the sarcophagus by William Kent when it was installed in Badminton House in Gloucestershire, England. You see, shortly after its discovery in Rome it was purchased by the young Duke of Beaufort, to whom it was sold as the Emperor Augustus's bathtub – which, unfortunately, it is not.

But it is a splendid example of Roman work of the third century, just before the classical style evolved into the drier and more spiritual aspect popular in the time of Constantine (reigned 324-337) and early Christianity.

Sarcophagus. Roman, around A.D. *220-230. Marble, length 7 feet 3¾ inches. Purchase, Joseph Pulitzer Bequest, 55.11.5*



These six plates with figural compositions are among the greatest triumphs of early Byzantine and early Christian art that exist anywhere in the world. They were found about 1913 in a treasure-trove on Cyprus, and three more plates of the same series remain in the museum at Nicosia, on Cyprus.

They illustrate the story of David's rise to kingship, as told in the First Book of Samuel. I think the great fight plate (the largest of them) is the one to focus your attention on. It is done in three registers: at the top, David meeting Goliath in the middle of the night; in the center, David beginning to wind up the slingshot as Goliath lurches toward him; and in the lower register, David cutting off Goliath's head.

There are control marks on the back (what you might call "silver stamps"), indicating that the plates were made in the royal workshop of Emperor Heraclius between 610 and 614. The legend goes that Heraclius ordered the story of David to be depicted since he, having killed his predecessor and usurped the throne, wanted to equate himself with David, and his bitter enemy, Chosroes the Persian, with Goliath. Heraclius also had his court panegyrist compose a series of poems advancing this same parallel.

Now, most people think of the style prevalent in seventh-century Byzantium as being dry, forced, stiff – but there were actually two artistic styles coexisting there: one, the hieratic style reserved for figures of Christ and the Virgin; the other, a far more juicy, lively style employed for hunting scenes or for things like the depiction of a favorite story, as on these plates. The fight plate, in the magnificence of its repoussé relief, symbolizes not only the indomitability of Christianity but also the indomitability of the Emperor Heraclius himself.

Six plates with scenes from the story of David. Constantinople, VII century. Silver, diameter of fight plate 19½ inches, diameters of others 10½ and 5½ inches. Gift of J. Pierpont Morgan, 17.190.4-9

IOHANNES BAPTISTA
VOX PATRIS
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SOL
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SCA MARIA
SCS IOHANNES

These four enamels represent the champlevé technique, which consists of taking a piece of copper, digging parts out as though you were making a woodcut, gilding it and putting in powdered enamels, and then firing it until the enamels become translucent against the gilded copper.

The panels depict the Baptism of Christ, the Crucifixion, the Three Marys at the Sepulcher (which has been partially destroyed, perhaps by fire, permitting us to see the depth of the undercutting in which the wet enamel was placed before firing), and the Pentecost.

Notice the strength of the eyes and noses, and the way the hands of the Virgin in the Crucifixion scene are clasped in genuine grief. These are the hallmarks of the Mosan school – the group of artists who worked in the valley of the Meuse River, in what is now eastern Belgium – and particularly of Godefroid de Claire, the famous twelfth-century craftsman in whose workshop they were made.

At one point these plaques were thought to have been part of the magnificent cross commissioned by Abbot Suger for the choir of St. Denis, the royal church. But if their past is not completely certain, their future seems assured: the colors are shining and will never fade, for they are as hard as if they were made out of precious stones.

The Baptism of Christ, Crucifixion, Three Marys at the Sepulcher, Pentecost. Mosan, third quarter of the XII century. Enamel on copper-gilt, all 4 inches square. Gift of J. Pierpont Morgan, 17.190. 430, 431, 419, and The Cloisters Collection, 65.105

If you read Latin of the late fourteenth and early fifteenth century, you will not need my translation of the inscription on the right side of the bench upon which the Virgin sits in this perfectly magnificent Madonna and Child. It is a quote from the "Little Chapter" of the Office of Our Lady, in the Book of Hours, and it reads: "From the beginning and before the ages, was I created. Even unto the age to come I shall not cease to be. In the holy habitation have I ministered before him." In a sense, that emphatic statement is exactly what this powerful sculpture is all about. Because there the Virgin sits with her child: monumental, weighty, and, in a funny sense, even overwhelming – a perfect example of the new style of humanism to come out of the Burgundian kingdom in France about the middle of the fifteenth century. The sculpture is supposed to have come from a small church in Poligny, in the center of Burgundy, but there is no real reason to say that this is true. The only thing that can be said about the connection of this Madonna and Child to the town of Poligny is that in a church there, there are other sculptures that seem to have been made by the same artist.

Look at this work carefully, first at the Madonna's face. Notice the sensitivity, the flesh under the chin, the lips, the intensity of her gaze. She is a loving mother, conveying something that in medieval art a century earlier – certainly two centuries earlier – would have been impossible, because then the Virgin was dogma. And look at the Child, a real baby, his lips tightened at the edges as a little laugh issues forth spontaneously. I hope that, to you, this masterpiece is becoming less of a medieval statue than a glorious young and very beautiful woman with her vigorous and, indeed, somewhat difficult child – with his foot jammed beneath the book, about to flip it off.

Everywhere you'll find details interpreted freshly and with scrupulous attention to reality (don't be afraid to look all over a piece of sculpture, which embraces, after all, 360 degrees). Even at the back, where it was set into the wall, the Virgin's hair is carefully delineated; the book's little leather fasteners are caught in the pages; the Child's curls are tousled; two buttons on the Virgin's cuff are shown unfastened. Even twenty years earlier, the artist wouldn't have taken such liberties of observation to make his piece come alive. That is what they were searching for in France around the middle of the fifteenth century. As the century progressed, art, unfortunately, became stylized. But here, captured in stone, is an isolated moment in reality, in sensitivity, in humanization.

Madonna and Child. French (Burgundy), mid-XV century. Painted and gilded limestone, height 53¼ inches. Rogers Fund, 33.23

Photograph: Michael Fredericks, Jr.

Photograph: Michael Fredericks, Jr.

St. Peter. Early Christian, perhaps v century. Bronze. St. Peter's, Rome

Buddha. Chinese, Wei dynasty, v century. Gilt-bronze, height 55½ inches. Kennedy Fund, 26.123

Being a medievalist, I'm far from expert on Oriental art, but this standing Buddha of the Wei dynasty is the equal of any sculpture done in any culture. Trying to put it into my own limited perspective of medieval art, I think that perhaps only the statue of St. Peter in the Vatican could possibly come close to this work, which was probably done around the same time. As the monumental Virgin and Child discussed earlier sums up an entire religion, so does this powerful sculpture. Of the fifth century, it is made of gilded bronze; it's unusually large for its early date, of great artistic quality, and offers some aesthetic surprises to many of us.

Look, for instance, at the way the cloak encircles the neck and the upper part of the chest. This is a totally different way of showing drapery than any we've seen so far: it doesn't cover the body, it doesn't reveal the body. It is there as a separate ornament but perfectly in keeping with the rest of the figure, a highly stylized and nonhuman – or superhuman – element suddenly becoming very human because of its suitability to the overall design. Look, too, at the series of v-shaped folds that reach upward like the wings of birds in flight, gradually rounding out into circles at the chest and neckline, as if they were ripples in a pool.

The Buddha stands on an enormous lotus flower. The right hand is held in a variant mudra, or gesture, of assurance ("do not fear"), the left hand in a variant mudra of charity (the dispensing of gifts). What a wonderful image of a religion!

Wainscoting from the chapel of the Château de la Bastie d'Urfé, St. Etienne, France. Mid-XVI century. Gift of the children of Mrs. Harry Payne Whitney, in accordance with the wishes of their mother, 42.57.4

Possibly you know that one of the Metropolitan Museum's strongest points is that it collects not only period rooms, but tries to furnish them to show the full environment of a particular age. One of these is a room that served as a chapel of a French château owned by one of the oldest families in France. The man for whom it was made, Claude d'Urfé, was attached in his youth to the household of Francis I, and held, among other important posts, that of ambassador to the Council of Trent. When the Council was meeting in Bologna, he met an extraordinary artist in woodwork, especially intarsia, Fra Damiano of Bergamo, whom he commissioned to create the wainscoting you see here. The panels were executed between 1547 and 1548, and remained in the château until 1874. Each panel has a different subject: there are architectural views, ornamental patterns, landscapes, and still lifes, and interwoven in every one of them are various meanings – some obvious, some containing subtleties of symbolism. One panel represents the tools of writing: the ink, the quill pen, the knife to trim the quill (the knife's handle is made not of wood but of mother-of-pearl). Another is a figurative scene showing St. Jerome removing the thorn from the paw of the lion – a rather naïve rendering compared to the still life. Over the altar is a representation of the Last Supper designed by Jacopo da Vignola and executed, signed, and dated by Fra Damiano of Bergamo himself. It is the culmination of all the other things we've seen in the smaller panels, for it combines architecture, landscape, still life, and human figures.

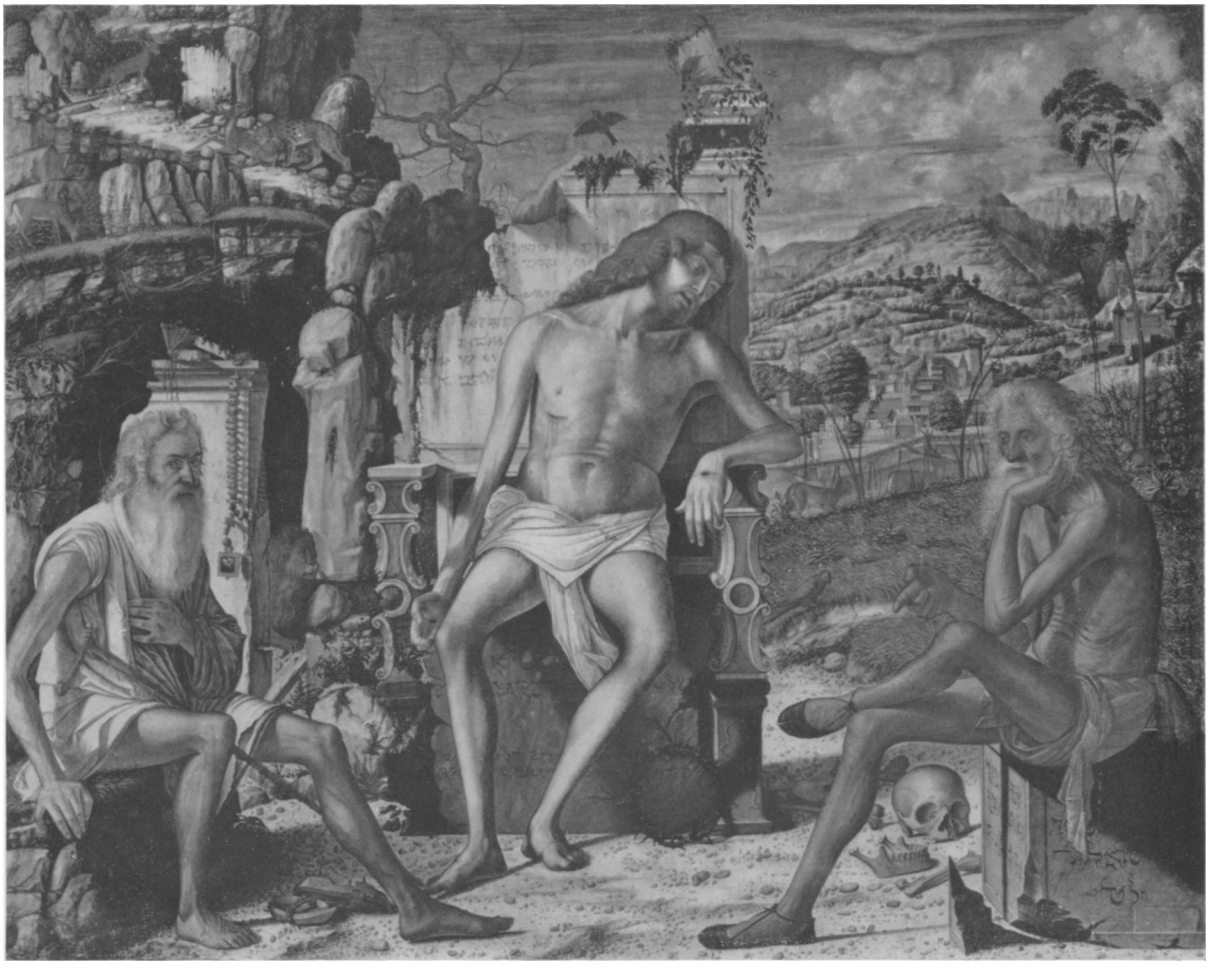
The stained glass in the windows was done by Valentin Bousch in 1531-1532 and is typical of glassmaking of the Renaissance in France. The marble sculpture on the altar, The Virgin and Child with the Infant St. John, was made in France, near Tours, around the middle of the sixteenth century, and shows a mixture of Italian and French influences, just as the wainscoting does. The exceptional relief on the front of the altar is a Descent from the Cross carved about 1550-1560 in the studio of Jean Goujon, the famous French sculptor, and, like the other elements of this room, it relates to the general environment because of its blending of Mediterranean and French influences.

Speaking of period rooms and architecture, nothing in the main building of our museum is more glorious than this patio from a castle on a hill above the mountain village of Vélez Blanco in Spain. The patio dates from 1506 to 1515 and represents the early Renaissance, not only in Spain but also in Italy. Indeed, it was made by Italian craftsmen who were brought to Spain by Pedro Fajardo, the Marqués of Vélez, a cultivated and ambitious Spaniard born in 1478. Although his castle was planned by a Spanish architect who was largely influenced by the Gothic and Moorish styles, the carving reflects Renaissance motifs. Look, for example, at those capitals holding up the arcade. Every one of them shows a very emphatic Italian influence in its foliage, the delicacy of its volutes, and the little heads and vases that are incorporated into the decoration.

Originally, of course, the whole patio was open at the top, but we had to enclose it for preservation. Even without the benefit of warm Spanish sunshine, however, you can envision the musicians appearing on that high balcony and filling the air with music. Continue looking up, and see the gutters decorated with waterspouts in the form of winged beasts. Look at the deftness of the carving everywhere, the way the foliage and the monsters and the birds really come to life. The whole place is a triumph of carving and a delight in its proportions – even to the upstairs balustrade, which borders a loggia where we show our prints and drawings.

The Vélez Blanco patio was bequeathed to the Museum by George Blumenthal, one-time president of the Metropolitan. He had used it as a salon in his house at Park Avenue and Seventieth Street. Upon Mr. Blumenthal's death, his house was torn down, the patio disassembled, and its two thousand marble stones carefully numbered and stored – but fortunately the Metropolitan did not give in to the temptation of disposing of it, even though at the time the Museum did not have a suitable place to install the patio. It was reconstructed here in 1964, and it acts as an imposing vestibule for the Thomas J. Watson Library, as a gallery for our Western European Arts Department, and, from time to time, as a sumptuous setting for special exhibitions.

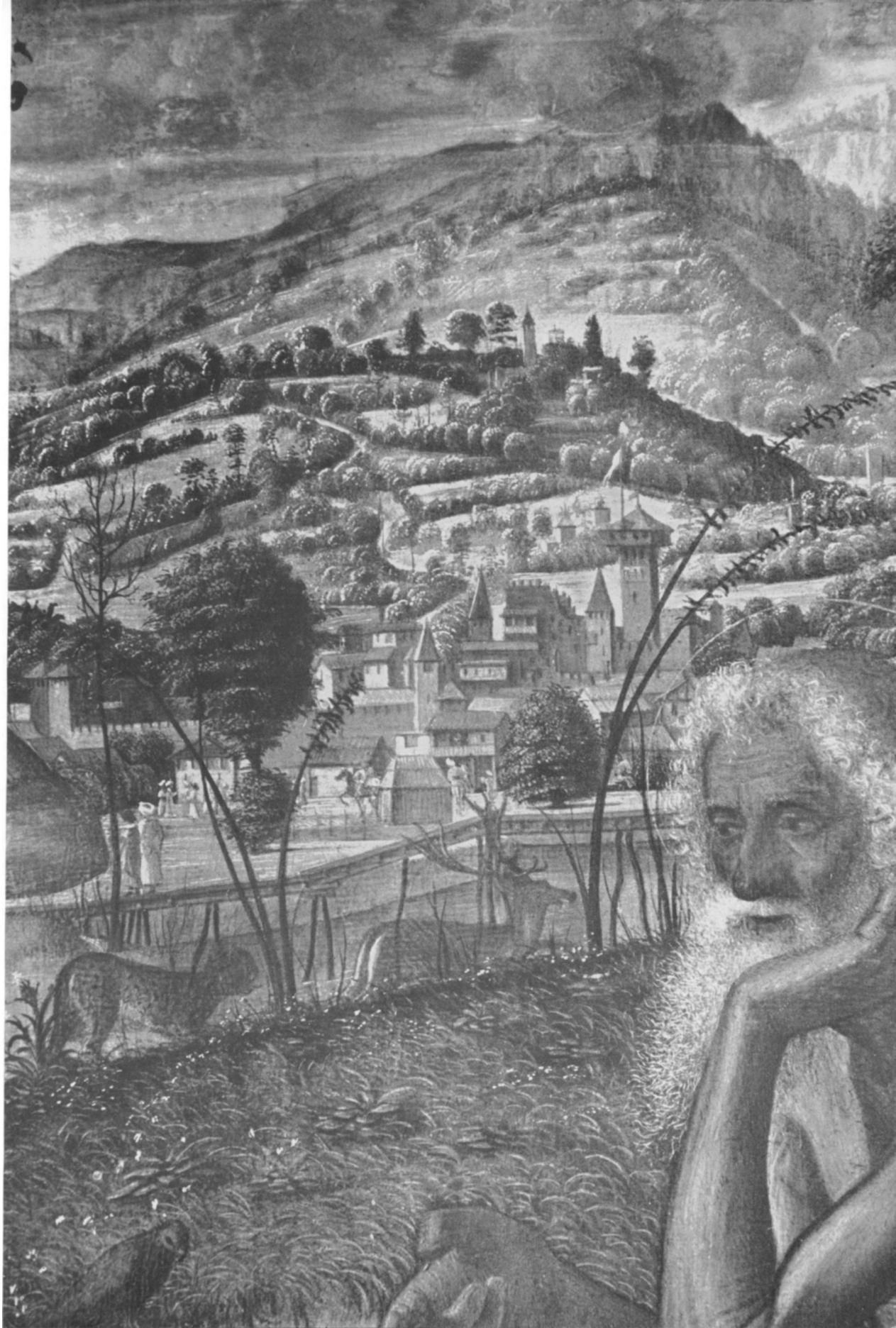
The patio from Vélez Blanco, Spain. 1506-1515. Bequest of George Blumenthal, 41.190. 482. Erected in 1964 with the Ann and George Blumenthal Fund



I would like to apologize for limiting to six the number of paintings I talk about here. But even in such a collection as ours, one must be able to isolate a few that reach a pinnacle of quality and fascination – pictures you could look at for the rest of your life and continue finding things you had never seen before, pictures that constantly refresh you. For me, one of these is The Meditation on the Passion by Vittore Carpaccio.

This painting shows the dead Christ in the center, St. Jerome on the left, and Job on the right, the epitome of patience. Just behind St. Jerome, beyond the fragmented stone, you can see his symbol, the lion. But to appreciate the meticulous nature of Carpaccio's virtuosity you must look far back into this extraordinary landscape – beyond the beautiful red parrot to the panther running after a stag, on to the water and the bridge passing over it, to the men and women talking in the village square of an Italian hill town. Look beyond the village up to the olive groves and vineyards, and back to the mountains, where a storm is brewing. Few people in the Renaissance had such a sense of observation as Carpaccio, the Venetian. For many years, though, this work was attributed to Mantegna, and, indeed, it bore a large Mantegna signature, but in 1945 infrared studies revealed Carpaccio's signature underneath. This picture is an icon: something for continued and intense contemplation, something you can come back to again and again.

The Meditation on the Passion, by Vittore Carpaccio (about 1455 – 1523-1526), Italian (Venice). Tempera on wood, 27¾ x 34⅛ inches. Kennedy Fund, 11.118



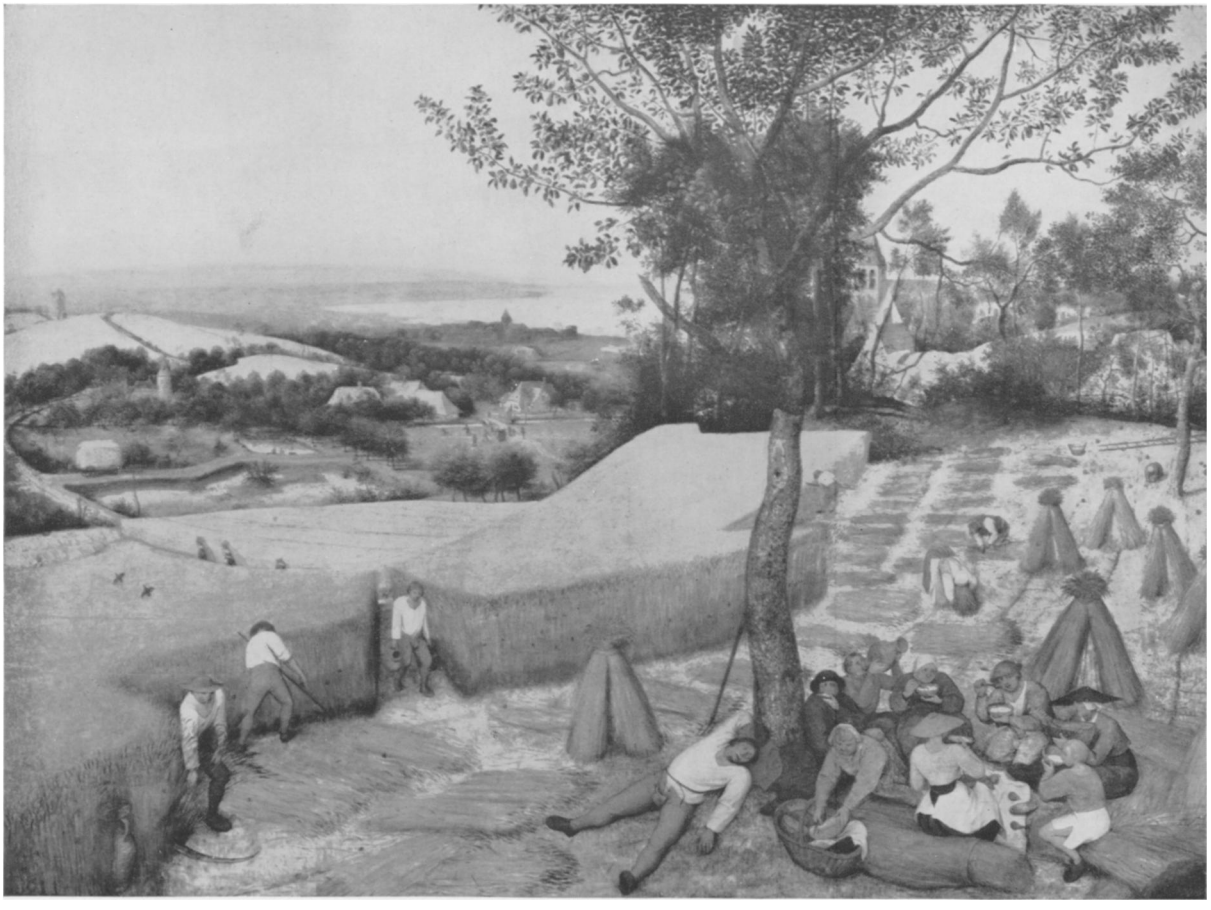
Photograph:
Michael Fredericks, Jr.

Only the very fortunate have been in the Bruegel room of the Kunsthistorisches Museum in Vienna. It's a gallery that has fifteen or twenty paintings by Pieter Bruegel the Elder, unquestionably one of the greatest painters who ever lived. This magnificent picture, The Harvesters, can, in a sense, sum up that room.

It was painted in 1565, toward the end of his career. This landscape captures the very spirit of a hot midsummer's day, when they're bringing in the first growth of wheat. And nothing could be more summery or hot for it is immediately after a big lunch, at least for the man in the foreground, who is stretched out in an extraordinarily loose manner in the deepest sort of slumber – you can almost hear him wheezing with every exhalation from that limp mouth. He's probably enjoyed some of the strong Northern wine that you can see another harvester tippling now. Others are still cutting and gathering and binding the wheat. But a reward in the form of another wine vessel is carefully hidden in the wheat to keep it cool until quitting time, and a boy is carrying wine, or perhaps water, through a new-cut passage. The view goes from the golden, almost throat-clogging richness of the wheat right down to the verdancy of the valley where the hay wagon is carrying away the crop. I think you can just make out, in the left center of the picture, some people swimming in a little waterhole in the middle of the village and others playing games in a field nearby. Other interesting figures and animals continue all the way back to the ships anchored in the harbor; it's two or three miles away and makes you want to put on binoculars to see who's working on the vessels.

A beautiful picture and, again, one of those things you could live with forever.

The Harvesters, by Pieter Bruegel the Elder (active by 1551 – 1569), Flemish. Oil on wood, 46½ x 63¼ inches. Rogers Fund, 19.164



We have many Rembrandts in the collection (over thirty) and although I love The Noble Slav and the Aristotle, A Man with a Magnifying Glass and A Lady with a Pink have meant more to me than any others, because they are really human beings, people painted from life. Nobody, so far as we know, ever captured man in quite this way: on the surface *and* underneath. A Lady with a Pink is the painting I'd like you to concentrate on.

The flower usually stands for betrothal – probably not her first, considering her age and the mysterious fact that x-rays reveal that the head of a child, near her knee, was painted out, presumably by Rembrandt himself. What is important about this picture, however, is not its symbolism but the way this woman has been presented as an individual. We've all known people like her, who have the same look that she does: with eyes that are entirely alive, with a mouth that's about to speak (rather gently, I think). Rembrandt has penetrated right into the brain substance itself in showing us this glance and this spontaneity.

Look at the way the paint has been put on, not only in the flower, which he has used as a focus, but in ever-increasing circles beyond that. Observe the shading: the drapery, for instance, seems almost like monumental red cliffs. See how the details are handled: the pearls with a touch of the leaden color they sometimes get, the gold glinting in that curious greasy way it looks by candlelight, the suggestion of a picture in the background, which is not allowed to intrude upon the human being that is the total subject of the painting. Rembrandt at his very best.

A Lady with a Pink, by Rembrandt Harmensz. van Ryn (1606-1669), Dutch. Oil on canvas, 36¼ x 29⅜ inches. Bequest of Beniamin Altman, 14.40.622

When I was younger, Watteau was a complete mystery and almost a complete bore to me. I couldn't really stand the fragility he seemed to impart to his pictures. But the older I got (and I hope the more knowledgeable and perhaps the more sophisticated I got), the more the delicacy of his colors and, as with Rembrandt, the humanity with which he painted began to surge forward. And this picture, portraying Mezzetin, a character from the Italian commedia dell'arte, is one of the supreme examples of Watteau's work. Painted at the very end of Watteau's brief career as an artist, Mezzetin combines stage reality with life's reality, highlighting the poignancy of the figure alone in a stage set, playing his guitar and singing a song. Is this a comedy character playacting, or is it a man not only acting but feeling real emotions? Is the melancholy that Mezzetin exudes part of the play, or part of the man? The glory is in the extraordinary enigma. And yet it flashes back and forth from enigma to reality. There's an eternal mystery about it, aided by the female statue with her back turned to Mezzetin: a very subtle allusion.

The painting was purchased from the museum in St. Petersburg (now Leningrad) in 1934, when Russia was trying to raise funds for the young Bolshevik regime. It has long been one of the five or six top pictures in the Metropolitan's collection.

Mezzetin, by Jean-Antoine Watteau (1684-1721), French. Oil on canvas, 21¾ x 17 inches. Munsey Fund, 34.138

I think it's becoming more apparent every year that one of the greatest painters in the entire pantheon of artists was Claude Monet. He was a person gifted with an acute perception of nature, who (sometimes highly successfully, sometimes not) conveyed that observation of atmosphere, of changing light. Very early in his career, he began to experiment with somewhat dark landscapes in the style of the Barbizon painters, but in the summer of 1867 he worked at his aunt's home in Sainte-Adresse, a little resort town on the estuary of the Seine near Le Havre, and this picture is the proof of his full awakening: a landscape done completely out of doors, in the sun. What we have here is a breath of air, wonderfully clear, rather warm, a day with a breeze whipping up, flags fluttering, a regatta starting off at the left, a little boat

darting near the shore. Everything is bathed in the fullness of August sunlight, and if you take a deep breath, you can almost smell the sea.

When you stand about twenty feet away from the picture, everything seems to work: the shadows at the left, the boats, the water, the splendid harsh contrasts of light and dark on the standing woman's dress. But when you get very close to it, it breaks up into fragments: the shadow is an ugly purple, parts of the dress look muddy, the gray is unconvincing and the white seems haphazardly applied, the grass at the right-hand corner sits there like a random diagonal, the flags look way out of kilter, and the boats in the distance seem to be lumps of brown-gray. But if you step back again, it is all transformed into a stunning reality. You see, Monet learned that you have to mix colors optically: not in the old way, by adding a little black or gray, but by combining colors so they would bounce off each other – for example, the shadow of something red has, perhaps, a little bit of green in it when it's near green grass. But although this was the first successful, totally outdoors, landscape attempt in the history of painting, it was roasted by the critics. In despair, Monet destroyed many of his early canvases and tried to commit suicide. For years he was unable to paint large works such as this, and only very much later in his life did he achieve the self-confidence that he richly deserved after *this* triumph.

Terrace at Sainte-Adresse, by Claude Monet (1840-1926), French. Oil on canvas, 38⅝ x 51⅛ inches. Purchased with special contributions and purchase funds given or bequeathed by friends of the Museum, 67.241

A Woman with Chrysanthemums, by Edgar-Hilaire-Germain Degas (1834-1917), French. Oil on canvas, 29 x 36½ inches. Bequest of Mrs. H. O. Havemeyer, The H. O. Havemeyer Collection, 29.100.128

The work of Edgar Degas is beautifully represented in this painting from the Havemeyer collection entitled A Woman with Chrysanthemums, one of the most penetrating portraits in art history – even though, curiously enough, it didn't start out to be a portrait. Indeed, it was a still life of the chrysanthemums and the pitcher of water on the table, and then later, as x-rays have shown us, Degas added the woman. Very happily, because this creature represents an extraordinary study of someone in thought. This, combined with the sheer glory of technique in the flowers, makes this painting one of the greatest in the Museum's collection.

Degas has really overloaded that vase, but he has been able to carry it off; in the hands of anybody else, the flowers would be a confused muddle. The textures and colors are marvelously subtle: certain areas reveal paint that may have been thrown on as if in a watercolor. You see, Degas thinned his paint very severely with turpentine, and on the cut-glass pitcher he has applied some colors as if they were part of a series of washes.

But one returns, invariably, to the woman, with hand to cheek, glancing out of the picture as if caught by a snapshot (Degas was very much interested in photographs and sometimes worked from them): this revealing search of human nature is as penetrating in its way as A Lady with a Pink by Rembrandt.

This is the last work to be discussed here, and at this point you may well be wondering how I could have neglected Sassetta, Botticelli, Vermeer – or El Greco or Van Gogh. And why didn't I include masterworks from our collections of ceramics, glass, or silver, or from our Costume Institute, to give just a few examples? Well, I hope my choices (and omissions) will pique your interest, so you'll come to the Metropolitan often and select your own special islands.

Flemish Drawings and Prints of the Seventeenth Century

A rich selection of Flemish drawings and prints of the seventeenth century will go on exhibition on February 14. Peter Paul Rubens will be the star of the occasion, represented by fine drawings and the splendid engravings and woodcuts executed in the studio under his masterly direction. His principal assistant, Anthony van Dyck, and Jacob Jordaens will dominate a representation of Flemish artistic activity of the time. The drawings and prints in the exhibition will come largely from the collections of the Metropolitan Museum, and New York collectors will generously participate in this event.

Peter Paul Rubens (1577-1640), Flemish. Study of a young man and head of a satyr. Black chalk, heightened with white, on light gray paper, 10 x 15¾ inches. Collection of Walter C. Baker, New York

A youth, here drawn from life by Rubens, is posed in a way that recalls the herms in Annibale Carracci's decorative scheme for the gallery of the Farnese Palace in Rome, which Rubens so much admired. The satyr's head may be inspired by a detail in the same scheme. Rubens, a highly original and inventive artist, did not hesitate to borrow and metamorphose the examples of his great predecessors. J. B.

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Peter Paul Rubens. St. Catherine. Etching, first state, counterproof with pen and ink corrections in Rubens's hand; 11⅝ x 7¾ inches. Rogers Fund, 22.67.3

This is usually considered to be the only print made by Rubens himself and is known in no other collection in a proof state. Rubens used pen and ink here to darken areas in the saint's hair, the shadows in her drapery, and in the clouds, which are those parts most heavily worked in the later states, finished in engraving by Lucas Vorsterman. The composition is adapted from one of Rubens's lost paintings for the ceiling of the Jesuit Church in Antwerp, commissioned in 1620 and destroyed by fire in 1718.

M. L. M.

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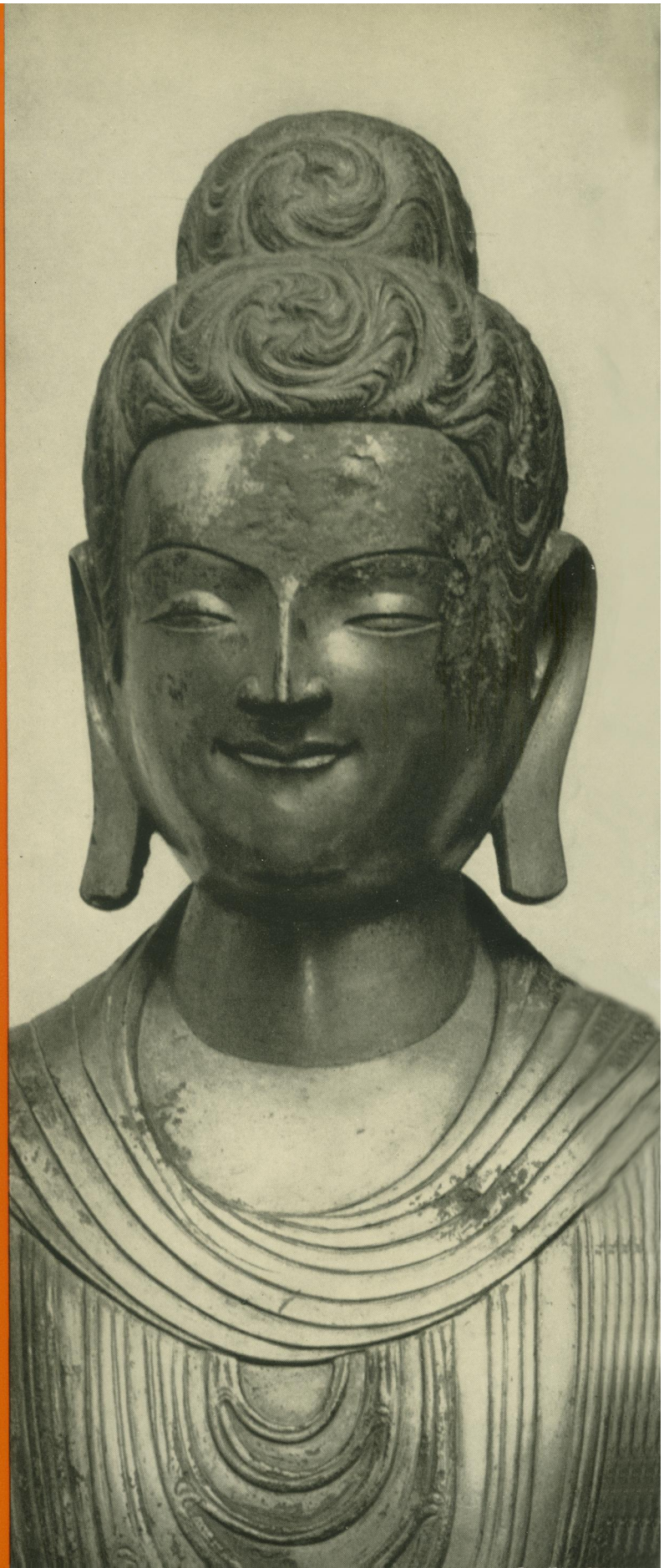
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